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CIA establishes 35 as age limit for new spies

By Tom Diaz
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James Bond — the famous agent "007" — needn't bother applying to the CIA these days.

He's too old.

Acting under a special law passed by Congress, the super-secret intelligence agency has set 35 as the maximum age for people newly hired to work in its "operational positions."

The age limit applies to persons hired from outside the agency for its operations training program.

But it's much easier to find out what the age limit is for an "operational position" than precisely what it is one does in such a position.

An agency spokesman said "operational officers" are people who work in the agency's Directorate for

Operations, in bureaucratic parlance, the DDO.

"The DDO is responsible for clandestine collection, which involves humans in some capacity, and nationally is responsible for U.S. counter-intelligence abroad, and for covert operations," the spokesman said.

That sounds pretty much like James Bond stuff to the popular ear, but for details one has to refer to other published sources. The CIA has a policy of not even admitting it is involved in any specific covert operation, much less commenting on the details of it.

But given the American fascination with the CIA's operational exploits — which actually account for only a small part of its personnel and resources — there are plenty of books, novels and magazine articles

available that purport to provide the inside story.

Some may even do so.

The latest annual oversight report of the Senate select intelligence committee provides an official, if roundabout, insight into the murky world of "certain positions" that the committee says demand "highly motivated individuals capable of being trained in unique skills."

The age limit, requested by the CIA, was justified, said the committee, because "the stresses and strains of uneven and uncertain hours of work, of duty in unhealthy locations, and of arduous assignments performed under difficult and often dangerous conditions require personnel who possess vigor, vitality and endurance, as well as emotional maturity."

By setting the new age standard, the agency clears up a point of criticism raised in the 1984 oversight reports of both the House and Senate select committees on intelligence.

Both committees took the agency to task for not acting on special legislation passed two years ago to allow the agency to set age standards for the positions.

The committee reports noted that the CIA's delay in taking advantage of the new law might make Congress skeptical of the agency's need for similar special legislation.

A spokesman said earlier this week that the matter has been cleared up now, after an internal debate over exactly what the age level should be.